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THE IDOLS

AN ODE



BY
LAURENCE BINYON

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The idols, an ode

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The idols

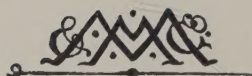
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A

THE IDOLS
AN ODE



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TORONTO

THE IDOLS

AN ODE

BY

LAURENCE BINYON



Luce intellettuale, piena d'amore

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON


1928

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

To
PERCY WITHERS

PRELUDE

 O, the spirit of a pulsing star within a stone
Born of earth, sprung from night!
Prisoned with the profound fires of the light,
It lives like all the tongues of eloquence

Locked in a speech unknown!
The crystal, cold and hard as innocence,
Immures the flame; and yet as if it knew
Raptures or pangs it could not but betray,
As if the light could feel changes of blood and breath
And all-but-human quiverings of the sense,
Throbs of a sudden rose, a frosty blue,
Shoot thrilling in its ray,
Like the far longings of the intellect
Restless in clouding clay.

Who has confined the Light? Who has held it a slave,
Sold and bought, bought and sold?
Who has made of it a mystery to be doled,
Or trophy, to awe with legendary fire,
Where regal banners wave?
And still into the dark it sends Desire.
In the heart's darkness it sows cruelties.
Bright jewel, it becomes a beacon to the vile,
A lodestar to corruption, envy's own:
Soiled with blood, fought for, clutched at; this world's
prize,
Captive Authority. O, the star is stone
To all that outward sight,
Yet still, like truth that none has ever used,
Lives lost in its own light.

Troubled I fly. O let me wander again at will
(Far from cries, far from these
Hard blindnesses and frozen certainties!)
Where life proceeds in vastness unaware
And stirs profound and still:
Where leafing thoughts at shy touch of the air
Tremble, and gleams come seeking to be mine,
Or dart, like suddenly remembered youth,
Like the ache of love, a light, lost, found, and lost again
Surely in the dusk some messenger was there!
But, haunted in the heart, I thirst, I pine.—
O, how can truth be truth
Except I taste it close and sweet and sharp
As an apple to the tooth?

THE IDOLS. I

THE IDOLS

I. I



N a starr'd, a still mid-night
Lost I halted, lost I gazed about.
Great shapes of trees branched black into the sky:
There was no way but wandered into doubt;
There was no light
In the uncertain desert of dim air
But such as told me of all that was not I,—
Of powers absorbed, intent, and active without sound,
That rooted in their unimagined might,
Over me there ignoring towered and spread.
Homeless in my humanity, and drowned
In a dark world, I listened, all aware;
And that world drew me.
The shadowy crossing of the boughs above my head
Enmeshed me as with undecipherable spells:
The silence laid invisible hands upon my heart,
And the Night knew me.

She put not forth her full power, well I knew:
She only toyed
With reason, used to sunshine flatteries,
The praise of happy senses, trusted true,
And smile of stable Earth's affirming ease.
Yet even in this her ante-room I felt,
Near me, that void
Without foundation, roof, or bound, or end,
Where the eyes fast from their food, the heavenly light,
The untallied senses falter, being denied,
The mind into itself is pressed, is penned,

Even memoried glories of experience melt
Into one mapless, eyeless, elemental Night.
It was so near
That like a swimmer toiled in a full-streaming tide
Drawing him unawares down the unsounded seas,
My soul sank into fear.

O for one far beam of the absenting sun!
O for a voice to assure me, and to release
Out of this clutching silence! There is none:
Shadow on shadow, and stillness on stillness
Enclose me, and fasten round.
Is this a world which Day never has known?
A world made only of doubt and dream and dread?
Is this the interior Night of the dark human soul,
And the immaterial blackness branching from the ground
A fearful forest that itself has sown
Against the stars to tower,—
Stars that dispense their faint uncertain dole
Of light, that darkness may the more abound?
Whither am I come? Where have my wandered feet
Brought me on circling steps, led by what furtive power?
Alas! in this dumb gloom wherein my spirit gropes
Only myself I meet.

Only myself; but in what strange image
Encountered and phantasmally surprised!
This thing of stealth that rises from the shrouds of sleep,
I know it, I with shuddering guess presage
An enemy,—the native of the night
That in me was disguised.
Hollow-echoing caverns where blind rivers creep

With soundless motion; ice-cold, sudden breath
Of climbing cloud, at whose abstracting touch
The upholding rock seems baseless as the mist;
Black silence in the eagle's captive stare
Empty of all but the baulked lust of death,
Could not oppress so much.
Even that which in the dark brain says ' I am ',
Desperate in its faltering to persist,
Flickers like an expiring lamp's last leap of flame
To leave me I know not where.

Let not the beautiful world perish and cease!
My heart cries, freezing in its secret cells.
Let me not be extinguished in the abyss,
Losing the blessed touch and taste of things,
Earth's heaven of hues and smells!
I am so far from worlds where any fountain springs,
Sunken into this placeless dungeon-dream,
That holds me without wall, or roof, or door.
The light is only legend: I begin
To give away my being like a stream
Wandering among unshapen shapes, that spin
A world of unintelligible dread;
And this world seeks me for its own!
All is dissolved, nothing has meaning more.
Each moment heaps an age of time above my head.
It is the very Mind of Darkness I am in,
Lost, and alone, alone!

I. 2

The Forests of the Night awaken blind in heat
Of black stupor; and stirring in its deep retreat,
I hear the heart of Darkness slowly beat and beat.

As if Earth, shrouded dense in gloom,
Shuddered in her guilty womb;
As if a power from under earth
Would bring some monstrous spirit to birth;
As if a spirit ran pursued
And sobbing through the shadowy wood;
Ghostly throbs of sound begin
To circle from the distance in,
A phantom beating, dulled, remote,
With madness in its fever-note.

I know not what about me or what above me oppresses
The suffocating air; but fear within me guesses
A peopling of the caverned glooms, miasma-cold recesses.

Leaves depending still, still,
Bronzed to blackness, spill
Dead light from a sinking moon,
Wholly to be sunken soon,
Wandering down a desert coast
At the horizon's end, a lost
Eternal exile from the Day,
Whence she stole a perished ray
That falls from off those fingered fronds,
Black as vipers, cold as bronze.

O is it from my heart or from the darkness round,
The far reverberation, the dull throb of sound,
A pulse, a fearful pulse, in air or underground?

Closer, quicker, through the heat
Drones, insists, the incessant beat.
Round in shuddering circle comes
Beat on frenzied beat of drums,
Nearer in from every side
Thudding, madly multiplied,
To seize the heart and blind the brain
With a monotone insane.
Terrible, terrible in continuance,
It holds me fastened in a trance.

O for a spirit that is not mine, to bear
This weight of the unfathomable night!
O for a spirit of more than mortal might
To take upon him this my load
Of infinitely wide world-quivering fear!
O for a Demon or a God
In saving presence to appear!

What is it that my eyes amid the gloom divine
There in the furtive filterings of the ghastr moon-shine?
What bodies sway and cry and to the ground incline?

The fear that held me falls apart,
But leaves a horror in my heart.
Stony, stony, of blank stone,
Fixt on that secret altar-throne,

Inhuman human Shape, with hands on knees,
With remote stare that nothing, nothing sees,
Yet is a magnet to a thousand eyes,
A thousand forms that crouch, scenting the scent of blood,
Beat breasts and writhe before you with ejected cries,—
Unbrothered beast, abominable God!
Who made you, and shaped you into more than breath
Can give a will to? What power drove the hand
With terror strong as lust, to shape you there
Immovable as Death,
And carve the rock of darkness in the mind
To horrible resemblance of my kind?

Lost Light, sunken Light!
From what I am, save me!
The fever-beat of sound is in my veins.
I breathe the black, blood-smelling air.
The ecstasy of fear, the blind throb in the breast,
I share it, I must share.
It is not I, I cry;
Yet it is I.
These are the powers that crave me;
This is the full dominion of the Night.

The victims, ah, the victims shriek and die:
And on them the eternal Idol stares.
But they have made him incense of their prayers,
Voluptuously have knelt before their own
Black terror, bodied into stone.
Not the expiring cry
So lacerates my mind, while without end
Through ages up the altar-fumes ascend,

And fading into shadow, from their bodies rent,
Stream spirits without number to conceive,—
But this, O victims, this, that you consent,
That you believe!

They were all human. My heart falters: how
That infinite bond refuse?
Like last reverberations of a bell
That in their ebb and last expiry tell
Of stupefying clamour, when it heaved
And shook its tower to the foundation,—now
Whispers out of the dark accuse, accuse:
I have consented. I have believed.

There is singing of brooks in the shadow, and high in a stainless

Ineffable colour ascends like a spirit awaking:

It is dawn, it is dawn, the light is budding and breaking.

Flowing out from the nameless immensity, night, where she
waited

Gloriously moulded, as if in her freshness created.

With their motionless fountains of foliage, perfect in slumber;

The blades of the grass re-appear, minute without number.

Familiar of old.

Bathing in gold;

And the dew-dazzle colours in fire the lichen it blanches.

And drawn by the light from their dream in earth's prison,
emerging

Distinct in their own
Form, from the formless a million natures are urging.

I see them, I know them, I name them, I share in their
being;

I am not betrayed:

I feel in my fibre the touch of a spirit that knows me;

For this was I made;

In a world of delight and of wonder my senses enclose me.

Whence come they, the water-brooks? Out of the moun-
tainous darkness,

Where no life is seen,

From caverns of night are they come, but because of their
springing

Meadows laugh to be green;

And hearing the voice of their carol, the children go singing.

The children go singing, they read in the books of the Light
Things hidden from the sage.

Unschool'd are their bodies, that run like a ripple and fear
not

Coming of grief and age:

The sighs of the night, the doubt in the shadow, they hear
not.

Lo, single mid grasses a flower upspringing before me

In delicate poise

Takes the light like a kiss from an innocent mouth, as it
quivers

Confiding its joys

To the air, and my heart from its prison of self it delivers.

I stand in the dew and the radiance, my shadow behind me,
Lost out of thought.

The bright beams ascend, and ascending, from earth they
uncover

The secret they sought.

Enter me; make me afresh, O Light, my lover!

I. 4

Why are these beams so twined with sweetness and with
 pain,
 Injury and anger, fear, and all desire,
 Whose purity should stream through pulse and brain
 Not thickened in dull fume or frayed with fire
 But absolute and whole
 Into the central soul
 Disclouded from those lures and all their train,
 Knowing what is and is not; white and bare
 As the bathed body quit of day's disguise?
 But the only truth is coloured with the secret stain
 Of our mortality, that unaware
 Infects the farthest vision of the eyes
 And region of invisible thought: Vain, vain
 That throbbing search! The Light
 Is more profound, more secret than the Night.

Who has built an airy mansion for the unresting mind
 To inhabit and rejoicing contemplate,—
 A many-pillared universe, designed
 In order clear, complete and intricate,
 Intelligible wonder, not
 Too vast to hold man's lot,—
 But he has waked on some malignant morn to find
 The certainty, too certain to be true,
 Distasted, and that palace only a maze
 Wherein he wanders and is still confined,
 The pillars of it fallen, and no clue,
 But through the ruin penetrates a blaze
 Of glory beyond glory and of light behind

The light: and the strength fails in him; he knows
Himself lost in a world that overflows.

Yet no power stills the ache or stops the springing need.
The dark creative spiritual Desire
Seizes upon his heart which holds that seed
And straightway, till the last of breath expire,
Like tool upon the wheel
Sharpened the more to feel,
He counts all else waste,—honour, wealth, a weed:
The burden of the beauty is too great,
The eternal mystery in the heart a wound,
Until his vision in the end be freed,
Until he has spent his all to incarnate
An airy spirit upon earthly ground,—
Forms for a God to dwell in and exceed
This fading flesh. Alas! from godlike shapes
Some yet diviner essence still escapes.

O that the form which once kindled to ecstasy
The rapt gazer, and freed him, should become
A cold thing to appraise with leisure's eye,
A beauty disinherited and dumb!
Whither is the spirit flown
From the forsaken stone
That seemed our sunken selves to deify?
O that the thought, the word, which into the heart leapt
Pregnant with light and troubling even to tears,
Should fade and wither, should grow old and dry,
By repetition dulled upon the ears
Like cheapened courtesies the lips accept,
And falsehood, custom cares not to deny;

A scumm'd and stirless pool, a frozen rut,
A path deserted, a door shut.

But that the life should be less living than the dead,
This is the worst; that perfect form and word
Should perish of perfection, yet be fed
With incense still, and duteously adored;
A name prostrate the throng
The presence moved among
Unrecognized; neglected and forsaken bled!
Time's treachery sleeks and glozes to our use
The bright eternal bareness: dearer grows
To mortals what is mortal, comforted
Mid alteration rather to keep truce
With the ancestral darkness than oppose
Too arduous scrutiny: by dreams we are led
Content: to pleasure us, our truth decays.
The God departs, the Idol stays.

THE IDOLS. II

II. I

I have heard voices under the early stars
Where, among hills, the cold roads glimmer white,—
Voices of shadows passing, each to the other,
Clear in the airy stillness
Call their familiar greeting and Good-night.

Were they not come as guests to a remembered room,
Those words, surrounded by the befriending silence?
But words, ah, words—who can tell what they are made of,
Or how inscrutably shaped to colour and bloom?
Sharp odours they breathe, and bitter and sweet and strong,
Born from exultation, endurance, and desire;
Flying from mind to mind, to bud a thought again,
Spring, and in endless birth their wizard power prolong.

There was a voice on a sun-shafted stair
That sang; I heard it singing:
The very trees seemed listening to their roots
Out in the sunshine, and like drops in light
The words rained on the grasses greenly springing.

Ah, lovely living words, what have we done to you?
Each infant thought a soul exulting to be born
Into a body, a breath breathed from the lips, a word
Dancing, tingling, pulsing, a body fresh as dew!
Once in the bonds of use manacled and confined
How have we made you labour, thinned from beauty and
 strength,
Dulled with our dullness, starved to the apathy of a serf,
Outcast in streets, abandoned foundlings of the mind!

Yet once, in stillness of night's stillest hour,
Words from the page I read
Rose like a spirit to embrace my spirit.
Their radiant secret shook me: earth was new;
And I throbbed, like one wakened from the dead.

O swift words, words like flames, proud as a victor's eye,
Words armed and terrible, storming the heart, sending
Waves of love, and fear, and accusation over
Peoples,—kindling, changing! Alas, but can you die,
Hardened to wither round the thought wherein you grew?
Become as the blind leading with slow shuffle the blind,
Heavy like senseless stones the savage kneels before?
O shamed, O victim words, what have we done to you?

II. 2

The Presses are awake. Under the midnight cloud,
Mid labyrinthine silence of the spectral streets,
Sound upon darkness beats,
A pulse, quivering aloud
Insanely, as if a fever throbbed in stone,
As if a demon plied in palpitating gloom
The hurry of his loom
To weave that tissue, white for an instant, then
Populated with words, shadows of thought and act,
Death, birth, fear, madness, joy, disaster, packed
Headlong into a medley, a monotone
Indifferently echoing alike
Laughter and the moan of men!

In the avaricious gloom a secret Ear
Sucks with a whirlpool greed out of the skies
Words, voiceless words, drawn in from far and near,
Bubble-blown rumour, whisperings like spies,
The knife-stab in the night, the fall of thrones,
Alarm of nations like a beating bell,
Jubilant feat, and misery grey,
Caught from all corners of the air pell-mell
In a voice that no man owns,
That a multitude of brazen masks shall shout
To the multitudes of Day.

The few stars, solitary in heights of night
Thieved by the cloud, shine and are dimmed again,
Though none puts out their light.
So solitary in the heart is pain,
Solitary the Dream,

Solitary the Vow, solitary the Deed!
There is no room for these
In that invisible cloud, woven of things that seem,
Sure of accepting softness and the greed
That it shall cling to and make cheaply wise,—
An all-uniting web of lies and of half-lies
And lying silences.

Into my ear, remote, remote, is blown
Out of the darkness and across the seas
Sound of a forest falling, young bodies of trees
One by one falling prone,
To be tamed to a helpless tissue, and to feed
The insatiate Presses' need.
O, did they spring to scent the blue silence of air
And sway slow to the wind, launching the light-winged
birds?
Ghosts only are there,
The ghosts of trees that shoot no fresh leaf any more
But, drones of darkness, in the midnight bear
Black myriads of words.

Invisibly the night thickens with words that glide
Driven thronging on blind errands, soon to fall
Into a million minds, and glorified
To be their momentary oracle,
Glitter, and then—they are like the innumerable snow
Chance-timed, indifferent, random, swift and slow
That falls to a stillness out of whirling flurry;
And workers heavy-eyed
That under the chill cloud of morning hurry,
Muffled against the shiver in the blood,

Soil it at every stride,
Till each articulate crystal whiteness is confused,
And where the moment's wonder shone is mud,
Trodden, stale, and used.

II. 3

Hewn and heavy, of granite hewn
Heavy and hard, the walls ascend
Bare, without measure to the eye:
Indifferent to night or noon,
Over pavement they impend.
Locked, impassive, huge, the Door
Stands caverned in the midst: on high,
Ruled and squared, the lintel stone
Bears the carven Janitor,
Justice, blind upon her throne.
Her no praying hands implore:
To her bound eyes no eyes plead.
Reason's idol, calm she sits,
Weighing only the gross deed,
Scrupulous with mind unsoiled
Not to know the thoughts that bleed
In the dumb soul, fluttering, beating
Hither, thither in its cage
Of ancestral ignorance foiled,
Rushing blinded into rage
And its own desire defeating.

Behind the door, within the wall
Locked, they sit, the numbered ones,
Secret from each other, all
Lost to name, like spectres passed
From the region of the sun's
Changeful glory on young limbs
Free to dance and free to leap.
From the acted thought they fast:
Them a roof of silence dims.

The midnight stars move over them;
They move not; but ruled times they keep
With the shadows on the floor.
They are mortised in a scheme,
Where the walls and fastened door,
Built of words that are become
Stones, are like their spirits dumb.

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In ripened rustle of the corn
The wind becomes a flowing flame;
As swift it curves and slow relents
The body of a wave is born.
It passes—whither? No one knows;
But in the vision that consents
It is the beauty it became.
The wind blows and the spirit blows,
No moment ever yet the same,
And fresher than a sparkling spring
The unrepeatd beauty flows;
And in the child that claps his hands
To see the daisy on the green,
And in the young man where he stands
Poised for the naked plunge; and in
The invisible bursting of the bud,
The leafing of the bough, that sends
Lightness like laughter through the blood
Of dancing girls, its wave is seen;
It flows and sings and never ends!
And flowers, trembling heavenly hues
In a lonely mountain place,
And chiming water's liquid curve,
The torrent's white, rock-ruffled race

Freed for splendour of its swerve,
And clouds that steal the solemn blues
Of noon, unregioned in their trace,
Or, ghostly travellers, invade
The mountains they dissolve in dream;
And mazes of the stars that fade
At dawn, still moving, lost in light;—
All, all the threads of music bind
Together in the visioned mind:
Eternity has imaged them.

O lovely is their secret Law
Timing all their motions true.
They know it not, yet they obey
Without thought and without awe,
Of that fountain unaware
Which they spring from and renew,
Finding out their missioned way,
Everywhere, oh, everywhere!
It is wild as a wild rose
And fearful as the weltering wave.
It is courage to the brave,
Wisdom to the eye that knows.
But we have bound it as with cords,
We have built it into stone,
All its motions frozen stark
Round a hidden human moan.
We have made it old and dark
Out of maiming thought and fears,
And the things our fears forbid,
Out of self-hurt and of rue.
We have built it into words,

And the words are stones! We did
What we could not help but do,—
We, the eternal Prisoners.

Break the word and free the thought !
Break the thought and free the thing !
But who in any net has caught
The wind, or in a sieve the spring?
As soon shall he dissever these,
Through which the life-blood single streams
From germ unknown to fruit unguessed,
Nourished with wonder and with dreams,
In its deep essence unpossessed
And smiling out of mysteries.
The flower is in the bud, the bud
Within the seed, beneath the ground.
But all is flowing of one flood
That is not seen, that is not bound.

This palace-prison of the mind
How in the youthful morn it glows!
Its windows flame with angel-light,
With changes of auroral rose,
And all the airs of heaven invite
With miracle of breathing blue
And shifting glory of sun and showers
To ecstasy and song,—and who
Remembers how therein confined
In sunken cells are captive powers,
Powers that a jailer fetters close
With chains of the invisible hours,
To one another hardly known

In furtive glimpse, and each alone?
O marvel of the world, O bright
And luminous palace, built to hold
The light of heaven within its walls
Precious with glory as of gold,
Why comes the night, why comes the night,
When, as about it the sky falls
Filled with the dark, it seems to stand
A dark tower in a lonely land!

II. 4

In the wonder of dreams on a wave of the sky buoyed
My body was the body of a wish, the word of a thought
Uttered whole from a throb of the heart in a cry's delight.
Never bird out of Africa beating a golden void,
Shifting the coloured regions that Spring has caught,
Pursued the desire of its being in flight
Happier: Time an idle ruin gleamed
Where vision flamed or flowered or streamed.

Slow, slow the mind gropes back to curb and term
Of this strange world; to Time that's used, and all
The enclosing, age-descended ritual,
The invisible garment, cobweb-fine and firm,
Wherein the limbs move to the ancestral call,
And hands repeat what dead hands did before,
And the mind lingers as behind a door.
The hinted glory of liberty is fled,
And in its stead
Is only the shadow of Man's ancient nurse,
Dear Custom, at whose knees he learnt the ways
Of his uncounted tribe, schooled to rehearse
Cruelty and folly, and, ere he comprehend,
Make these his virtue, so to earn her praise.

Massive as mountain to his childish gaze
Is that unmoved authority, a power
His fibre trembles to offend.
And slow as the Earth is in her seasons, she
Befriends and punishes like sun and shower;
Well-used to tears and the heart-broken hour,
Smoulder of mutiny and anger, tamed in the end,

Indulgent of a laughter brief as those,
For all come back at night-fall to her knee,
When the old shadows descend.
With mutter upon her lips, with eyes half blind,
Buried mysteries she knows.
With dark fountains of ignorance in her mind,
How wise she seems, amassed in ancient certitudes!
Her silences, how comfortably kind!
The human slowly grows
Inhuman, where she broods.
And if a solitary spirit would wrest
His wrongs away from what so closely cleaves,
And break into the world that he believes,
Betrayers from within, crying Traitor! seek
To pull him back, securely weak,
In passiveness: he sucked it from her breast.

O away and away and afar from this alien home,
Where spirits are woven together in words of fear,
Released into innocence let me have being and breath!
But is it alone by mercy of dreams that I roam,
Liberated to joy's essential sphere,
In an antechamber of birth or beyond death?
All flushes around me and then dissolves away.
The heavenly dawning closes gray.

II. 5

Once, only once, never again, never,
The idle curve my hand traces in air,
The first flush on the cloud, lost in the morning's height,
Meeting of the eyes and tremble of delight,
Before the heart is aware
Gone! to return, never again, never!

Futurity flows toward me, all things come
Smooth-flowing, and ere this pulse beat they are bound
In fixity that no repenting power can free;
They are with Egypt and with Nineveh,
Cold as a grave in the ground:
And still, undated, all things toward me come.

Why is all strange? Why do I not grow used?
The ripple upon the stream that nothing stays,
The bough above, in glory of warm light waving slow,
Trouble me, enchant me, as with the stream I flow
Lost into the endless days.
Why is all strange? Why do I not grow used?

Eternity! Where heard I that still word?
Like one that, moving through a foreign street,
Has felt upon him bent from far some earnest look,
Yet sees not whence, and feigns that he mistook,
I marvel at my own heart-beat.
Eternity! how learnt I that far word?

THE IDOLS. III

III. I

Not for pity and pardon, for Judgment now I cry!
To be seen, that I may see; known, that I may know,
For this I cry.

Dwelling among dear images dream-created,
Flattered or daunted by a deluding mirror
That is not I,—

O to taste the light as my body tastes the air,
Let fall defence, cast off the obstinately excusing
Pleas, and myself be my only vindication!
Nothing but this in the end can satisfy.

Why does this desire pursue me and so possess me?
Is not breath sweet, and the young smile of the morning?
Yet inly to know
That I am bound in a net of minutes and of hours,
Inheriting bondages of habit, and fear,
And ancient woe;
To be rooted so deep in lost ages of time,
With tendrils of hope and want and frail repining,
The ignorant accomplice of purposes abhorred:
This thought is my companion and my foe.

Sometimes to fly to some remoteness of the air
To perceive with different senses, a new body,
I pine and ache;
As on this bed of self, whereon I am bound, I toss
Day and night, filled with ineffectual longing
That bond to break.
O yet, enslaved, I know not to what I am enslaved:
Only this husk and shard of what I am, this fond

Dreamer of dreams, eater and drinker of untruth,
This only I know, and this cannot forsake.

Wondrous glories crowd into the eye's treasure-chamber,
Wondrous harmonies linger in the ear's recesses,
Stored for delight.

But beyond the ear's compass what modulations fine
Tremble, and what marvels unapprehended sparkle
Beyond the sight!

O, and beyond the mind's capacity of conceiving,
Much less of measuring, amplitudes of wisdom,
Fit to sustain eternal serenity and courage,
While we go clouded, faltering, finite!

Were I stationed in the sun, to behold the worlds
Not nightly in declension but in dance triumphant
And timeless rolled;

Had I the vision, closed to the eye's horizon,
Labyrinths of an unimagined minuteness
In the mind to hold;

Could I attain the greatest and assume the least,
Shrink to be a blade of the innumerable grass,
Soar eagle-winged amid the altitudes of noontide,
Then might I measure, and what I am behold.

But rained over with riches of hours and moments,
Meshing me as a lily, thick with honeyed light,
The drunken bee;

Intoxicated with wild sweetnesses of sense,
Fullness of the opened heart, glory of earth, and beauty
Enamouring me,—

Roofed in a den I am, a poor captive rather
Who sits in fetters eyeing the barred, the precious blue,
Where high in the envied air a cloud lingers in light
And wings fly whither they desire to be.

Lying in the night I hear from graves unnumbered,
Under stars that have seen all history passing,
The indignant cry:
Must we only in effigy and phantom be remembered,
Malignedly obscured or mocked with gilded pretences,
Wherefrom we fly?
Will none unwind these cerements? none lift up from us
This load of false praise and false fortune's betrayal?
Let us be known in nakedness of our nature!
Deliver us from dominion of the lie!

As if they wandered in deserts and groped in caves,
I hear the exclaiming of disenchanted spirits
In bitter lament
Beholding the barren things for which they wasted
The world, the pitiable causes whereon their breath
And blood were spent!
Was this the Light, this little candle at noon? This loathed
Cruelty, the righteousness for which they thirsted,
Sacrificing to invisible idols of the mind?
They see. But who hears? This world is content.

Perfect Experience! Is not the mind worthy
This, when for glimpses only and shining fragments
The martyrs bled?
Majesty and splendour of overcoming vision,

Vision all-judging, certain and universal,
Not this I dread,
But to remain banished into a parcelled being,
Eternized in all these faculties of error!
Better a perfect oblivion in Earth's vastness,
By that eternal ignorance comforted.

Yet does my heart not cease from its supplication,
Yet I remember and cannot be satisfied,
By Time oppressed.
And, as if summoned and drawn whither I know not,
Clinging into earth with strong fibres of nature,
In dark unrest
I burn like a seed that in burial forgotten
Pushes its hope up, growing in blind affiance
Toward the light shining over an unconceived world,
There to be lost, illumined and released.

III. 2

In my dream there was a Door.
Dark on my musing path it stood
Before me, and straightway I knew
(The certainty ran through my blood)
That, did I open and pass through,
I should know all for evermore.
Those slow hinges, and that weight
Relenting on them, would unroll
The hidden map of all my fate
And all the world and the world's soul.

Who has trembled not at doors?
Motionless, they shake the heart.
Hope and menace on them hang:
They are the closed lips' counterpart
Wherein the sentence is concealed
For leaping joy or lancing pang.
Ah, what answer will they yield?
Will it be barren as the shores
That endless waves beat, like a knell
Slowly repeated to Time's end?
Or will it be the ineffable
Still radiance that shall all amend,
Melting out Time's ancient stain?
Will they open on sunrise
Everlasting, or will they
Close upon the light again,
Like eyelids closing over eyes
That see for the last time the day?

Is it not by such ancient dread
Inspired,—the warning doubt of what

Our prospering spirits has full-fed
With certainties by hope begot—
That on his progress proud we raise
For the returning conqueror
The arch, the immaterial door,
So he may pass, amid the blaze
And loud acclaim at glory's height,
Beneath a shadow of the night,
Where the hinted powers take toll
Of what is mortal in the soul?

O Door, like secret sealed decree,
Image of death, image of birth,
Ever uncertain certainty!
O silence as of silent earth,
O silence into substance built,
O night projected into day,
O still unspoken Yea or Nay,
O brimming vessel still unspilt,
O end that meets us on the way!
What lies behind your blank accost?
Is it the treasure we have lost
And laboured wearily to recover?
Or something that we never knew,—
Another mind with other measures
Laughing to scorn our pangs and pleasures?
Is it at last the only true,
The unknown Love, the unknown Lover?

With all my soul at earnest gaze
Fixed upon that silent Door,
I stretched my hand the latch to raise,

I lifted up my hand, and then
Some power forbade me, and I forbore.

In the changes of my dream
I was borne to a far place
Empty and wide, and all a-gleam
With sunlit quivering of the grass.
There rose before me, vast and blind,
A towered prison, walled and old;
It seemed a prison-house so great
It could have held all human-kind.
In the midst there was a gate.
And as I dreamed my dream, behold
I saw the prisoners released.
The gates rolled back; and forth they came
Stumbling in the light that smote
Full on them from the dazzling East.
Like knives it stabbed them; like a flame
It seared them; with their hands they hid
Their faces, or as if by rote
Stretched out vain arms, to touch and feel
Familiar walls closing around;
Then, lacking fetters, halted lame
Waiting to do what they were bid.
Their helpless motions made as though
They would run back, or fall, or kneel
Or hide themselves beneath the ground.
This way and that they looked to go.
O never may I see again
Such looks of blank and empty pain!
They were looks of men betrayed
And of their naked souls afraid.

But some there were, a few, that stood
And stretched their arms up to the sun,
As if the light streamed through their blood,
As if their breath was now begun;
As if their spirits till then had slept,
As if they never yet had known
The world of life that was their own.
These it was, not those, who wept.
Was it for pity of all that sad
Throng, or the extreme joy they had?
O that on earth I could have sight
Of those faces, and that light!

III. 3

I am laid within a place of summer leaves.
Solid boles mount through foliage out of sight.
No shadow lacks some intimacy of light,
No penetrating radiance but receives
Shadowy immersion. Dream
Is on me, is on the hushed, the thronged and drowsing glow.
Even the thoughts emerging from the mind,
Like voices in a sleeping city, seem
Reproved. This is old Earth, so old and kind,
That she is lenient in her overflow
To all things human. Why, why tease the sense
For a hope to a fear unmated?
Why rend the rich seam of experience?
Why toss upon thoughts frustrated?

Each way appears a closing avenue,
Leading, among warm scents, I know not where.
But Whither is to the idle mind no care,
For always there is fragrance of some clue
Neglected, that might guide
As in a trance the veiled soul to its unknown peace:
Peace such as comes like lips laid upon lips,
A brimmed oblivion of all else beside;
Like anchorage to tempest-blinded ships
When the thwart waves resign, and the winds cease.
Earth with warm arms embrace me, and let me feel,
Feel only, a wonder working,
Until the tender and still sense reveal
The secrets round me lurking.

Now might you come back, old divinities,
Earth-born, from cradling green and lost recess,

Serene in your unclouded nakedness,
To enrich the mirror of my musing eyes.
As fruit on the rough bough
Globes itself, the last golden glory of the tree,
Smooth from wild earth the human image rose;
And what diviner shape should hear the vow
Of mortals, or what else their secret knows,
Though past the ache of our mortality?
Shall I not sacrifice unrest and fume
On an altar here secluded?
Let the vext mind re-open like a bloom
Upon which the light has brooded?

Delay me from the sight that only sees!—
Frost of a dawn disclosing the world bare,
And, stript of splendour, all things as they are,
When stiffened grasses and stark branches freeze,
And the mind shrinks apart
With all the living colours famished out of it.
O kindly mediation, interpose
Images of those forms that hold the heart,
Warm, wondrous forms whereinto the world flows
To bloom and to perfect them : O admit
Certitude to obscurity awhile,
As cloud in the light suspended.
Gracious is Earth; not far her secret smile:
And here is the soul befriended.

Only such sorrow as lingered in the gaze
Of Proserpine, returning from the dark,
Such tears as filled her, listening to the lark
And looking on the flower that springs and sways,—

All humanized for her
As even the shadows were, when she was throned in night;
No more than these, to enhance the glowing day,
Shall enter where the green leaves are astir!
Shall I not be sufficed, and charm away
Perplexities to soft and shadowy flight?
Shall I not now—O whence is this breath come
Of Time in a stealing chillness?
Why cries my heart out? Why are all things dumb,
And strange, strange the stillness?

III. 4

Whisper to me, whisper! I have listened and have not
heard.

Whisper to me, you leaves; have you not more to say?

Now at the ebb of the low evening ray

Whisper some word left over from the day,

The one word, the lost word!—

So I cried; and then was stilled.

For suddenly, unsought, unwilling,

I knew not how, I knew not whence,

There came a lightening of the sense;

I found an answer from within,

That made me to the stars akin;

My pulse obeyed the lovely Law;

With ears I heard, with eyes I saw;

And one leaf, veined with green, indwelling light

Seemed the world's secret, that absorbed me quite.

Eternity through a moment

Sparkled; I could not turn away my sight.

What thing, long contemplated, alters not

Its seeming substance, as the deepening mind

By contemplation passes out of thought,

Immenser worlds to find?

The Mother as she clasps her infant boy,

Bent over him with the deep looks of joy,

Becomes her own hope; O, she stays

Not with the idol of her gaze,

But she is gone beyond her farthest prayer

And Time's last injury, to meet him there.

All that distracts him from her bosom now,—

White butterflies, a waving bough—

Presages the usurping world: she grows
To something more than fear and hope forebode,
Wide as the sky. He goes
Out of her heart's possession;
Yet in her arms he lies, that stranger and that God.

Free on its wings the mind can hover, worlds away,
To where the vast Atlantic stream
Dwindles to a watery gleam,
And like a star in bright noonday
The body's home is lost.
The mind can tell me that these mossed
Gray boulders in green shadow deep,
Appearing sunk and socketed in sleep,
Beneath their image of repose
Are all a dizzy motion whirled,
A streaming dust our sight so gross
Confuses to a solid world.
Never mortal eye has seen
Those minim motes, no thought can lodge between,
So restless in their secret fever
They dance invisibly for ever.
Alone the soul has knowledge of release;
Only in the soul is stillness,
Poised to receive a universe in peace.

Only in the soul is stillness! I remember an hour,—
It was the May-month and wild throats were singing
From bough to bough that breathed in bud and flower,
And the full grass was springing
Beneath an old gray tower—
I remember those blue, scented airs,

And how I came at unawares
Beside the daisied border of a mead
Upon a pool so magically clear,
It made each coloured pebble and furry weed
And star-grained sand within its depth appear
Like things of Paradise, unearthly bright;—
No surface seemed to intervene
Fairy floor and eye between,
Save for a traceless quivering of the light,
Gentle as breathing sleep, where stole
Up from its pregnant darkness
The living spring, as private as the soul.

Love from its inward well, a secret wonder, arising
Clear as the trembling water-spring,
A spirit that knows not anything,
Simple in the world and nought despising,
Changes all it meets,—the stone
Becomes a gem, the weed a rose;
But O, within itself it grows
By all it touches, all it makes its own,
Vast and multitudinous, a Power
To act, to kindle and to dower
In pain's and fear's despite
With glory of unending light.
O fountain in my heart, I feel you now
Full and resistless, so I nothing scorn.
How could I lose you, how
Ever for an hour forget you?
This is the world whereinto I was born.

Why did I tread long roads, seeking, seeking in vain?

Why did I make lament of the dark night?
Why crouch with images of old affright?
Eternal Moment, hold me again, again,
Bathe me in wells of light!
It is now and it is here
The something beyond all things dear,
The miracle that has no name!
When I am not, then I am:
Having nothing, I have all.
It was my hands that built my prison-wall,
It was my thought that did my thought confine,
It was my heart refrained my heart from love.
Now I am stilled as in a gaze divine,
Now I flow upward from my secret well,
Now I behold what spirit I am of.
The Body is the Word; nothing divides
This blood and breath from thought ineffable.
Hold me, Eternal Moment!
The Idols fade: the God abides.

THE END



LONDON: CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND GRIGGS (PRINTERS), LTD.
CHISWICK PRESS, TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE.





W9-AFE-610

